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**William Beinart and Joann McGregor (eds), *Social History & African Environments*. Oxford: James Currey(hard covers £45.00, ISBN 0 85255 951 8; paperback £18.95, ISBN 0 85255 950 X). 2003, 275 pp.**

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open. They catalysed the current crackdown on critics of the ruling party, journalists, students, and members of Pentecostal churches, violating clause after clause of the Constitution. In this Epilogue, Bereket agonises over the misplaced trust that led his Commission to omit an 'effective date' from the Constitution, setting it in action. It is this omission that leads me to conclude that despite 300-plus pages of this text, the real story of the Eritrean Constitution will not be written until my former students and the many other proud Eritreans experience life under the protection of their 'home-grown' Constitution. As Bereket himself says early on, 'It is one thing to write a good constitution. It is quite another to ensure constitutional rule' (p. 32).

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WILLIAM BEINART and JOANN MCGREGOR (eds), *Social History & African Environments*. Oxford: James Currey (hard covers £45.00, ISBN 0 85255 951 8; paperback £18.95, ISBN 0 85255 950 X). 2003, 275 pp.

It is, perhaps, inevitable that a book which states its purpose is 'to capture some of the diversity of themes and approaches to the current study of African environments' (p. 3) will appear eclectic in focus. This edited collection of papers, which arose from a conference held at Oxford University in 1999, is nevertheless an important addition to the growing body of work on African environments and landscapes. A very thorough introduction by Beinart and McGregor goes a long way towards making up for the volume's eclecticism by firmly outlining its position within, and contributions to, the wider body of literature on the social and cultural dimensions of environmental history in Africa.

The book is divided into three parts. Part one consists of five quite different papers gathered around the theme of 'African environmental ideas and practices'. The first two of these papers share a focus on African management of particular plant species. Emmanuel Kreike's paper shows how African settlers in Ovamboland (southern Angola and northern Namibia) increased the range and quality of particularly valued indigenous fruit trees. Karen Middleton's interesting but cautionary tale of the colonial transfer of the prickly pear in Madagascar both highlights the importance of understanding 'local responses to and appropriation of plants' introduced in the context of the imperial project, but also warns against overstating the role of human agency, concluding that 'it would be mistaken to assume that landscapes are nothing other than cultural and political artefacts' (p. 59). If Middleton's paper warns against neglecting ecological and environmental factors, then the purpose of Innocent Pikirayi's paper is to challenge the 'environmental determinism' that has often dominated archaeological debate about the rise and fall of pre-colonial states on the Zimbabwean Plateau, by using evidence from Portuguese texts of the Mutapa period.

In his paper, Terence Ranger argues that much of literature on the 'ecological religion' in Zimbabwe has tended to ignore or downplay the role of women. Cautious of overstating the case, his paper is nevertheless provocative in the questions it raises about the origins of patriarchy and what he calls 'the masculinisation of eco-religion' (p. 76). JoAnn McGregor's paper on landscape and memory in the Zambezi Valley is the last paper in the first section, and one I particularly enjoyed reading. This is in part due to its similarity to my own work, but more importantly because of its exploration of the way in which

past relationships with the Zambezi river landscape are invoked in the historical narratives, memories and identities constructed by marginalised people in order to provide meaning, and assert claims to resources, in the present. Here the focus is not simply on uncovering past engagements with the landscape but also on exploring the continuing and persistent importance of such histories and memories today.

The four papers that form part two of this book engage with perhaps the most familiar theme in African environmental history: the examination of colonial conservation policies. The papers do not, however, simply repeat established arguments but, rather, offer welcome critique and added complexity to the history of colonial science. In particular, Helen Tilley's thorough examination of the African Research Survey argues that 'there existed among its many advisors a subtext of criticism, dissent and debate, which at times challenged the very foundations of British colonial rule in Africa' (p. 109). These intellectual traditions often highlighted the 'extreme heterogeneity and complexity of Africa's environments' and could be sensitive to African approaches to environmental management but, she argues, they are too 'often dismissed or ignored in literature concerned to document the ways in which "colonial scientists" "misread" the African landscape' (p. 111). In a similar vein, Grace Carswell's paper examines the reasons behind the successful implementation of terracing in colonial Kigezi in Uganda. She points towards a combination of factors for this success including, among other things, the similarity of initial soil erosion policies with existing local strategies, and the ability of officials to tailor 'standard' approaches to local conditions (p. 131). While John McCracken's paper delivers a more familiar argument by relating the imposition of heavy-handed colonial state interventions to the rise of violent, nationalist resistance in northern Malawi, his case study also complements Carswell's work because many of the factors that she identifies as key to the successful implementation of soil erosion policies in Uganda, McCracken shows to have been absent in northern Malawi.

With the exception of Jane Carruthers's excellent chapter on Khomani San efforts to reclaim parts of the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa, and despite being entitled 'Settlers and Africans: culture and nature', the papers that form part three of this book are, as the editors themselves note, 'primarily about white settler ideas' (p. 21). David Bunn's paper analyses the complex role that photography and visual images of wildlife played in 'public investment in Kruger as an imaginary landscape' (p. 219). Sandra Stewart's paper also focuses on the role of an idealised concept of 'nature' in the consolidation of a national Afrikaner identity. Analysing naturalist writings on ants by the Afrikaner nationalist poet and naturalist Eugene Marais, she develops a sophisticated argument that emphasises the 'obvious potential for the Afrikaner nationalist programme' of Marais' work which 'was simultaneously able to claim autochthony and progressiveness for the Afrikaner' (p. 228). Robert Gordon breaks new ground in the study of African environmental history by focusing on the role of dogs in Namibia, the analysis of which, he argues, 'opens doors in the history of colonisation' (p. 240). But while his paper is fascinating, I felt that he could have given more attention to the role of dogs in African discourses about white settler society, which he only turns to briefly in his conclusions. Presumably, and hopefully, this forms the subject of another paper.

Overall this book is an important addition to the literature on the social history of African environments and landscapes. The strength of the book lies in each paper's contribution to different aspects of this broader field of academic research. Their diversity does reflect the interdisciplinary and diverse

nature of this growing field. I particularly enjoyed those papers that dealt with African engagements with the environment and landscape in the more recent past (McGregor and Carruthers) and do feel that one weakness of this volume is the predominance of papers that deal with colonial settlers' perspectives, and the corresponding shortage of work on African ideas and practices.

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LIZ WALKER, GRAEME REID and MORNA CORNELL, *Waiting to Happen: HIV/AIDS in South Africa: the bigger picture*. Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner (paperback US \$25.00, ISBN 1 58826 263 4). 2004, 143 pp.

This book is the product of a historic 'AIDS in Context' conference which was held in April 2001 at the University of the Witwatersrand. The participation and support of various health institutions and non-governmental organisations in the conference clearly reflected the intense concern in dealing with a disease which affects millions who are poor, marginalised and voiceless. However, *Waiting to Happen* is not simply a compilation of the presentations at the conference. Instead, the authors have selectively utilised new findings, different perspectives and emerging trends to produce an extraordinary array of factual information to alert the public as to the ravages and repercussions of one of humanity's greatest challenges.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the book is the portrayal of traditional healers and their usage of herbs as being as important as medical doctors and anti-retroviral drugs in treating HIV and AIDS. Not surprisingly, there is considerable optimism especially among faith healers (*sangoma*) dealing with spirits and traditional healers (*inyanga*) who use herbs. It is vital that these 'healers' be properly educated on the transmission and treatment of the disease to prevent exploitation by charlatans. This is a necessity since the majority of those infected and unwell seek treatment and are usually misled by these non-medical personnel.

The authors have given an accurate impression of the dangers of concentrating solely on a biomedical solution to curb the AIDS epidemic. Interestingly, the use of traditional or herbal medicines as a viable treatment is being explored by a medical school in South Africa. The stereotyping of traditional healers as 'unprofessional' was evident in July 2000 when they demanded recognition at the international AIDS conference in Durban.

There is optimism, as the authors argue, that, with the correct drugs and nutrition, HIV could be 'a chronic, manageable infection' and the dreaded AIDS 'a treatable disease' (p. 8). Despite this feeling of hope, a minor shortcoming of the authors is the failure to enunciate clearly who would be responsible for the fight against HIV and AIDS and how more funding could be accessed. Should priority be given to children or adults? The depleted and scarce resources make it difficult to decide on the successful outcome.

Conflicting stories on remedies and prevention serve to confuse those seeking treatment and complicate the campaign against HIV/AIDS. Whilst public health campaigns strongly advocate the use of condoms, some religious groups and persons believe it encourages promiscuity. An illustration of ignorance contributing to the spread of the disease is the firm conviction of a church leader: '...for AIDS I blame the government. It has spread it. It has spread it through condoms' (p. 97). Such stigmas and taboos are major obstacles which hamper the fight against AIDS.